

The Professional Marine Communicator

DEDICATED TO THOSE WHO HAVE GIVEN THEIR LIVES TO MARINE COMMUNICATIONS

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April 1988

WOO Petitions to Close

Manahawkin, NJ - Radio Station WOO, Ocean Gate Radio which is owned and operated by AT&T has petitioned the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to close. In the petition, no specific date was given. According to PROCOMM's sources, the reason given for the request was that "AT&T was putting in a new trans-Atlantic Ocean cable." AT&T has a Bermuda Cable terminated at WOO's Manahawkin, NJ receiver site, but AT&T sources at the Long Line division are unofficially at a loss to explain the official AT&T explanation for the request by stating that the building of a trans-Atlantic cable will reduce the need for WOO. The source goes on: "This station is a Marine Station, it has nothing to do with submarine cables. AT&T has for years advertised that the Marine Stations WOO, WOM - in Florida, and KMI in California are a SYSTEM. They said ships shouldn't worry about which AT&T station to contact, just use the nearest, or if that station is busy, use any of the others. Now they are trying to close the Atlantic station (WOO) because compared to WOM which is located near Ft. Lauderdale it doesn't have as much traffic. It doesn't matter to the AT&T big-wigs that all the passenger ships run in the Caribbean, and WOM is the closest station. Of course they're going to use the closest station."

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F.C.C. staff changes...

In what has been seen to some observers to be the political price to be paid for not bringing back the "severed head of the Radio Officer" from Geneva last October, the F.C.C. has announced several staff changes: Special Services Division Chief (which includes Marine and Aviation), **Mr. Raymond Kowalski** has left the Commission to join a Washington, DC law firm specializing in communications law. Replacing him will be **Mr. Robert McNamara**, who was the former Chief of the Division's Aviation and Marine Branch. **Mr. William J. Tricarico**, who has been the F.C.C.'s secretary for the past ten years will leave the Commission shortly to become the Executive Secretary of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, he will be replaced by **Mr. R. Walker Feaster**, Acting Secretary. Mr. Feaster has been with the Commission's Office of the Managing Director for 14 years. At the end of 1987, the F.C.C. was short two of the five commissioners it is supposed to have. **Three commissioners, however do constitute a quorum**, so the F.C.C. will continue to take action on matters before it.

WLO adds AMVER & WX

Mobile Radio/WLO has recently added new services. According to Mr. John Klemm, WLO will now accept AMVER traffic free of charge. This traffic is sent directly to the U.S. Coast Guard's AMVER Operations Center in New York. The automatic AMVER system is accessed on WLO's automatic telex system by entering the "AMV+" command after receiving the "GA+?" prompt. Stations using Morse Code can send their AMVER traffic directly to WLO's Morse Operators on WLO1, 2, or 3 morse circuits. It is not known if WLO will accept AMVER traffic on its radio phone circuits. WLO has announced traffic lists and WX broadcasts on 8514 and 12886.5 kHz. A morse list is sent at the beginning of each hour, and a SITOP broadcast (FEC) is made at 40 minutes after the hour. Details concerning the times of the weather products being sent are given after the traffic list. CW weather is sent following the CW list, and SITOP weather is broadcast after the SITOP traffic list. The weather products being broadcast at the time of this writing are: Gulf of Mexico, North Central Atlantic, Southwest North Atlantic, Caribbean Sea, Pacific High Seas and Tropical Storm warnings.

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AT&T should consider all these stations as a system as they have been telling the marine community for the past fifteen years."

AT&T has also cut back on the number of operators working at Manahawkin/WOO. According to a source at AT&T's WOM Ft. Lauderdale station this results in stations calling, but not being answered because the operator is busy on another call. PROCOMM's source says: "The system of watch keeping at WOO is different than the one we use here at WOM. Over in New Jersey they have the channels scanned, and they can only listen to seven of them at one time at any of the operator's position. Here we can listen to them all at once. WOM is in a higher traffic area and we get more calls. If a vessel is in the North Atlantic, or in Europe he will have much better luck by contacting WOO. I think that AT&T should drop their High Seas Radiotelephone charges from \$4.98 a minute to, let's say around \$2.15 a minute. They would have a lot more traffic. I'm sure that they would make up the lost revenue in increased traffic. Even here at WOM we have idle channels, we'd love to fill them up. But there is a world-wide depression in the marine industry. Seamen don't have the money like they used to afford \$4.98 a minute phone calls to their loved ones."

PROCOMM notes that of the three stations, WOO in New Jersey has been the most innovative. WOO has a SITOP system which gives the weather, traffic list and sends digital sequential calling (DSC) on 8051.5 kHz to vessels so equipped. This would allow vessels to receive their telephone calls within minutes instead of having to tune in a traffic list manually.

Our source at WOM continues: "People mistakenly believe that the Comsat system can't be intercepted; that it is a secure telephone call. That's nonsense. All a coperate spy has to do is install a satcom receiver and monitor the telephone frequencies on the Atlantic satellite. It's a lot easier than hunting around the short wave bands and finding a ship. On the satellite the signals are not scrambled, or anything. We had the capability to scramble here at AT&T, but there wasn't a big call for it. If the FCC had gotten off its butt and standardized DSC, we'd have a system with flexibility and instant communications."

According to the SITOP broadcast by WOO, Radio Officers and others are invited to write to Radio Station WOO and make their comments known. Comments and questions should be sent to:

Mr. John Morgan, AT&T, Post Office Box 550, Manahawkin, NJ 08050

Short Takes..

Closure of Baltimore Radio/WMH on hold, Exemption of 22 ships from carrying Radio Officers on coastwise/international voyages to Alaska is on hold. Sea Land's new ships (the ex- US Lines ships) crewing up with ROU members in mid-March.

Chatham Radio/WCC appears to be the only station on during the early A.M. on the East coast. Tuckerton Radio/WSC appears to go dead between 11 PM and 5 AM. WMH has been dark for for several years now. According to PROCOMM's sources, neither station has officially notified the FCC regarding this shutdown, nor notified the Commandant in Charge of the Marine Safety Office in their respective District that they have terminated watchkeeping on a distress frequency as required. If this is true, this leaves Chatham Radio/WCC which operates with only one person on both SITOP and morse telegraphy at night as the only commercial station open for traffic on the East coast.

Halifax Coast Guard Radio/VCS has changed its SITOP watchkeeping. According to an announcement on their CW frequencies, VCS is now only guarding 8 MHz SITOP. Previously, they were scanning 4 to 16 MHz. Ships, however, had to call several times to allow the receiver to scan to the frequency and set up the transmitter frequency first to enable VCS to respond to an ARQ call.

Tampa Radio/WPD adds much needed 4274 kHz CW transmitter. Now if they could hook up a 4 MHz SITOP...

As reported elsewhere in this issue, U.S. Coast Guard Commsta San Juan, Puerto Rico/NMR has suspended watchkeeping on 16 MHz.

Please send all information and any articles to PROCOMM: We need your input and information.

A Note from the Editor.

I am sorry that this newsletter has not been published since December 1977. I have had another eye operation and my vision is not what it used to be, so it takes me much longer to sit and write this information for you. I had a detached retina which required a second operation, and my other eye is already blind. Also, I have not been getting any news from my readers! Won't you please take a few moments to write me and tell me what you have to say? Perhaps you have some information that could be needed to help our profession.

NOTE

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Perhaps you have some interesting idea that could be used, or some technical, or non-technical article that you would like to see published here. This newsletter is sent out without cost because it was hoped that everyone would support the gathering of information. I know that many of you "out there" have many things to say: please write and I will put your information in this newsletter. This newsletter was not intended to be a one man undertaking. It was intended to be a forum where the views and news of those involved in Marine Communications can be heard. If for some reason, you do not wish to have your name mentioned, please put your comments on a piece of paper and at the end put please do not use my name. I want to know who sent in the information so that I can determine that the information is not just being planted to misinform PROCOMM. However, over the past three years, the information received at PROCOMM has been wonderfully accurate. If you think of writing as a chore, then you can leave a message for me at 617-665-4704. Please send in some envelopes with your name and address on them and sufficient postage for one ounce. Contributions to defray printing costs and telephone calls to confirm stories are greatly appreciated. Again, please send me your information so that we can help each other.

R/O
73

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Did the Comsat fail during the SOS of the M/V PRINSENDAM/PJTA?

PROCOMM has received part of EXXON's response "Reply to the opposition of the ROU and the ARA" dated Jan. 29, 1988. In a letter to Mr. Charles M. Meeham, Keller and Meeham, Washington, DC, Mr. Charles Dorian, Director, International Liaison, Marine Services, COMSAT. Mr. Dorian is also known as the ex-U.S.C.G. Captain Dorian who tours the world as an independant Marine Safety Consultant and has testified to a Liberian Court of Inquiry that over 70 percent of all radio distress calls go unheard.

In the letter, Mr. Dorian says that the MARISAT terminal was operational and in full use for public correspondence immediately before the declared distress situation. (Do records indicate that it was operational after the PRINSENDAM declared the SOS? - Ed.) Mr. Dorian notes that the Radio Officer onboard the PRINSENDAM did not directly dial the telex number of the Coast Guard's Rescue Co-ordination Center (RCC). Mr. Dorian states that "Users Guide" for COMSAT states that the vessel should have dialed the telex number of the RCC. PROCOMM notes however that the operational guidelines for the direct dialing of the RCC were issued after the distress of the PRINSENDAM. PROCOMM also notes that shortly after the alleged mishandling of the distress of the PRINSENDAM, COMSAT issued bright red gum backed stickers with the telex numbers for the RCCs for mounting at the ship operator's operating position.

Mr. Dorian also calls attention to the IMCO SLS Circulars * 7 and * 8 which "advise of actions being taken in Norway and Canada and which are very pertinent to the use you desire." PROCOMM wonders if this was an early indication of EXXON's wish to delete the Radio Officer from their ships.

See Related story

EXXON on this page.

EXXON reportedly will lay off all their R/O's if they obtain exemptions.

PROCOMM has learned in a letter dated 17 March 1988 from Mr. Carl Engh that according to Mr. Phil Krieger, a shoreside electronics maintenance technician at EXXON Shipping, that EXXON has requested from the FCC a waiver in order to exempt all of its vessels operating within 500 miles of the U.S. coastline including the Alaskan trade from carrying any radio officers. According to Mr. Engh's letter "After obtaining the requested FCC waivers, Exxon intends to hire 'part-time' (without company benefits) radio officers only as needed for specific voyages exceeding the 500 mile limit."

Mr. Engh concludes "Should EXXON be successful at receiving such waivers, then this action will undoubtedly have a very detrimental effect since all other companies having U.S. vessels in U.S. coastwise trade will quickly follow suit regarding F.C.C. waivers. A substantial number of radio-electronics officer jobs will be eliminated in short order."

You saw it first in PROCOMM

U.S. Coast Guard Communications Station San Juan, Puerto Rico to close.

According to information received at PROCOMM, Comsta San Juan/NMR will close completely. Effective 1 February 1988, NMR shut down its 16 MHz HF watchkeeping. PROCOMM and others had speculated at that time that the U.S.C.G. was going to whittle down that station closing it piece by piece, until having very little left, there would be no concern as to its closing. [PROCOMM reported in 1986 that NMR was rumored to be closing, and many comments were received from Coast Guard Radiomen concerning this.] NMR only keeps watch on Morse Telegraphy as it has neither SITOP nor radiotelephone facilities. Radio Officers have noted that because morse was all they had to operate that NMR kept a better watch than the other Coast Guard Stations. By using a MUF-Plot program, which is a smaller version of the U.S. Navy propagation prediction program, PROCOMM has determined that for paths to the Medeterranean, Africa, South America and Africa that U.S.C.G. COMSTA SAN JUAN/NMR has more openings on more frequencies to these areas than the nearest HF watchkeeper, NMN in Portsmouth, VA. We assumed a solar flux of All HF from NMR closes on April 1, 1988 !

FCC changes requirements for Six Months Service Endorsement... (Again...)

According to Mr. Bernard A. Stoller, Assistant Regional Representative of the American Radio Association (ARA-MM&P), The Federal Communications Commission's Private Radio Branch (PRB) has changed the requirements for the six-months sea endorsement. According to Mr. Stoller, the FCC will now accept service on ships equipped with only radiotelephone. In addition to accepting service on radiotelephone-only ships the FCC's PRB is now accepting sea service from the U.S. Navy and U.S. Coast Guard. Prior to this change, the PRB was not allowing time served onboard U.S. Coast Guard vessels, or U.S. Navy vessels. Likewise, sea service at Radiotelegraph Stations aboard ships which were not compulsory, such as The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Barges, the small Military Sealift vessels like the USNS KANE and small research vessels like the Woods Hole Oceanographic Vessel MV KNORR were not allowed. PROCOMM could not verify if service onboard these smaller vessels would again be allowed to qualify for the six months sea service endorsement. These ships were allowed up to the latest changes in the guidelines for six months sea service that the FCC announced several years ago. At that time, as previously reported in PROCOMM, the FCC also required that the six month period of time needed for the endorsement not be the period of time employed onboard a vessel as a Radio Officer, but the actual number of days spent keeping a log at that ship station. Other industry sources who decline to be named are speculating if this flip-flop is a result of the confirmation of the continued need of Radio Officers for the Future Global Marine Distress and Signaling System (FGMDSS), and from pressure from MEBA-D2-AMO (Marine Engineers Beneficial Association - District 2 - Associated Marine Officers - Ed) which is having great difficulty in locating Radio Officers willing to work for the low pay and zero respect and representation that MEBA D2-AMO offers. Our source goes on: "MEBA D-2 has lots of MSC ships and they want a Radio Officer onboard, but they can't get Radio Officers. I don't blame the guys for not working. Look at what they did to the Radio Officers on the Alaskan run. (See October 1987 PROCOMM for the story of the removal of the Radio Officers on the SS WESTWARD VENTURE and the SS GREAT LAND - Ed) D2 doesn't give two (expletive deleted) about the Radio Officer."

105 which is the average National Bureau of Standards figure for March 1988, and discovered that more frequencies were able to be used for communications with these areas than from NMN in Portsmouth, VA. Also the Maximum Usable Frequency (MUF) from NMR San Juan was higher in most cases. This means that signal levels from these locations to NMR would be higher than those received at NMN in Portsmouth, VA.

PROCOMM has in the past advocated that commercial radio operators take over the communications duties of the U.S.C.G. PROCOMM believes that given the superiority of commercial operators, U.S.C.G. communications efficiency could be improved ten fold. By allowing the private sector to take over these duties of the Coast Guard, the strain of maintaining and staffing these stations would be reduced. Keeping these stations in top shape with the best equipment and operators would be necessary to maximize profits. A yearly charge for communications handled for the USCG would be made. The Coast Guard could maintain its own cryptographic section. The actual transmission over terrestrial radio would be handled by the private sector. The private sector should not and does not tolerate incompetence on the circuits. If shipowners are paying for a High Seas Communications service, they should get the best.

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